

## [James Thomas Wood]

Life History

Words

EDITORIAL FIELD COPY

by

Mrs. Florence Angermiller, P.W. #15

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Pioneer Experiences Before and After 1875 REAL COUNTY, DISTRICT #10

JAMES THOMAS WOOD.

"This is a sketch of my life from a child up to now, on the frontier of Texas. I was born in San Saba County January 6, 1857, and lived there until I was twenty-one years old. My father was a among the early settlers in that county. I have been told by some of my relatives that my sister, two years older than myself, was the first white child born in San Sabe County.

"My father had a large family. He was married, twice and had seven children by each wife. My mother had one girl and six boys, and my step-mother had four girls and three boys.

"My mother was like most other women of those days. They had to card and spin and weave to make cloth to clothe their families. They also knitted all of the socks. People didn't buy everything they wore then like they do now. They didn't have to have silk

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stockings to wear every day like most of the ladies and girls do these days. They wore good substantial clothes which they made themselves, and they got along just as well as they do now, if not better. I don't know how many pretty blankets and coverlets my mother had that she made herself, but she had enough to keep her family warm in cold weather, and plenty when company came to spend the night. If the women got new calico dresses in those days, they were just fine enough.

"My grandfather settled on a little creek known by the name of Richland. C.12 - 2/11/41 [?]

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He had quite a large family and owned several Negro slaves. His children all married and settled up and down the little creek, so when his grandchildren came to see him, they were quite a bunch of little folks. He would get us all together and go fishing or plum hunting, and we would surely have a fine time. He seemed to enjoy it just as much as any of us. I thought there was no one on earth like my grandfather. When he was with us, we never thought of Indians or anything like that, although they came in almost every light moon and stole horses and often killed someone.

"As my grandfather died when I was small, I'll say something about what my grandmother has told me of her experiences on the frontier. Everybody called her Aunt Betsy and called Grandpa, Uncle Jimmie Wood.

"Grandpa cleared a little field and cut holes and made rails and fenced it. He dug the land up with a hoe, planted corn and raised it for their bread. Of course, it wasn't much trouble to kill deer and turkey for their meat, but they didn't have much fat about them, and she had to have grease to make soap; so she saved all of the deer and turkey bones, put up an ash hopper and filled it with ashes, poured water on the ashes, which dripped lye, then made soap.

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"People couldn't go to the store in those days, buy a can of lye, and make a pot of soap in a few minutes. They didn't know there was any such thing as concentrated lye.

"My father was a blacksmith by trade, but he worked at it only at times because the heat and dust from the forge seemed to injure his eyes, so he followed the ranch business until after I was grown.

"People didn't farm much in San Saba County when I was a boy, although it is a fine farming country now. Of course, there was some farming done then, but very few farmed for a living.

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"My father raised a few of all sorts of stock except goats. He raised a little buffalo calf on a cow, and it stayed with the cows just like the other cattle. After it was two or three years old, he sold it to Dr. Hudson for fifty dollars.

"Dr. Hudson was starting to drive a herd of cattle to market, and he took the buffalo with the cattle. The cattle stampeded one night and the buffalo with them. The next day it went up to a man's house with some of the cattle, and the man killed it, thinking it was a wild buffalo.

My father was a great hunter, and he enjoyed hunting bees, as well. One time he had been off on a hunt and found a bee tree. He didn't have anything to put the honey in, so he killed a deer and cased its hide, then [out?] the bee tree, filled the deer hide full of comb honey, and took it home.

"One of the worst murders I ever knew about and one of the saddest sights I ever saw happened there in San Sabe. An old man came in there from up north who had some money. It was thought that he came there to buy cattle, as cattle were being driven out of that country by thousands after the Civil War.

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"There, were two young men came in there, either with this old man or soon afterward. They claimed that they were waiting for the old man to buy the cattle, and they were going to help drive them up the trail.

"My father and Dave Low ran a blacksmith shop in San Saba at that time, and Mr. Low ran a hotel. This old man slept in a little room in the back of the shop and took his meals at the hotel. One morning he failed to go to breakfast, and when they went to see about him they found him dead. He had been gagged and robbed. The murderers had tied 4 a big red handkerchief in his mouth and left him that way. I went and looked at him just as he lay there. It was one of the most awful sights I ever beheld.

"The wo young men were missing that morning, so the officers suspected them of being the murderers, and they sent word everywhere to watch for these two men. They were caught not far from Lampases and brought back.

"The sheriff wanted to chain them together, and he had Pa to make some irons to go around their necks. Then he brought then to the shop and had them kneel down while Pa braided the irons to their necks. I watched him while he was fastening then together, and it looked awfully bad to me to see those man chained together.

"The smaller one of the two confessed to the murder, and they were taken off-somewhere and put in jail. The bigger one broke jail and ran off, but the smaller one refused to go with him. I don't remember whether or not they ever tried the little man for the murder.

"When we lived on Highland Creek, there was an old man by the name of Poe who lived just acros the creek from our house. He gave me a scare some way—I don't remember just how it happened. I was small and every time be saw me he would halloo at me and I would run. I was so afraid of him that I would watch for him, and if I saw him coming I would run and crawl under the bed and stay hid until he left. He was the only person I

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remember being afraid of when I was a little fellow. I don't think a bunch of Indians would have scared me worse if I had seen the coming.

"This old man had be a married and his wife was dead. His children had all married and left home, and he married an old maid named Mary Gay, a fine woman. I thought a lot of her; she was so good to little children.

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Sometimes old Grandpa Poe would go somewhere to be gone all night or several days, and Ma would get me go and stay with Mrs. Poe, or Aunt Mary as we called her, until he came back. I liked to stay with her, but I would watch for old Grandpa, and if I saw him coming, I would run, or slip off and go home.

"The poor old follow went on a buffalo hunt with his son, Jess Poe, and some other men. He got tired of hunting and wanted to go home before the rest of the party did, so he hitched his mules to his wagon and started home. That night he camped and hobbled his mules out to graze. The next morning it was foggy, and while he was hunting his mules he became lost and couldn't find his way back to camp. He was out several days without anything to eat or drink, and when the rest of the party started home and got to where he camped, finding his wagon there, they began to hunt for him. They finally found him lying in the edge of a little hole of water with his tongue so swollen that it stuck out of his mouth. He was so weak from thirst and starvation that he was helpless, and something had bitten him on the mouth — they supposed it was a skunk. They took him home, but he lived only a few days afterward.

"I was very small when the Civil War broke out, so I don't remember much about the first part of the war; but I remember well when it was over. Uncle Spence Wood was in the war, and when it was over, we heard that he was coming home, and all that could went to meet him. We were so glad that he had gone through the war and had come out without a scratch although he fought in several big battles. He said that the Yankees, as they

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owned the Northern men, came near to cutting him off from his command in one battle. He was riding an old sorrel, straight-backed horse that he called Straighty. He just turned old Straighty loose and outran them and got back to his command safely.

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Uncle Spence was the only one of Pa's brothers who was in the civil War; the rest of them were on duty guarding the frontier against the Indians. My father belonged to the Minute men. They served as rangers to scout after Indians, although they had to scout only ten days each month unless the Indians made a raid in the country. Then they were supposed to be ready to go at a minute's notice.

"Sometimes my father would be gone for two or three weeks, and there was no one but my mother to look to for protection. But we felt safe as long as she lived, for she could shoot a gun as well as any man, and father said that she could beat him shooting a 'sixshooter.'

"We didn't have as good schools then as we do now. Generally, out in the little country school, the term was very short, often not more than three or four months. So my schooling was just enough for me to learn to read, write, and spell, and some arithmetic. I just got to division; so addition, subtraction, and multiplication were about all I learned in arithmetic.

"I went to one school three miles from home after I was large enough to carry a gun. So pa let me carry a gun, for the Indians were coming in almost every month. If they saw that a person had a gun, they were not so likely to run on to him. Besides, I could shoot very well.

"There were lots of deer there, but I had never shot at one. So one evening on my way home from school I went hunting for a deer. I saw a little buck under a tree hunting acorns, so I slipped up to a log and lay my gun on it in order to take a rest to shoot. It started to

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come toward me, so I waited until it got within seventy-five or eighty yards of me and shot at it; the deer ran a little way and fell dead.

“As I was the oldest boy in our family, I was the ox driver, or bull whacker, as some called him. The last time I was in Austin, A man named John Stevenson and I went with an ox team each from San Saba 7 to Austin after a load of lumber. I think that the distance was a hundred miles. I believe that we got one dollar per hundred for hauling the lumber. It was in the winter and we weren't feeding our oxen. We hobbled them out at night, as the range was fine, and they could get plenty to eat.

“Sometimes some of the old oxen would try to run off at night. They would hit the road after dark and go just as far back toward home as they could before daybreak. Then they would quit the road and go into athicket and lie down. They would lie so still that we could not hear their bells ring — we always had one ox of each yoke belled. This may sound like a big story to anyone who never drove an ox team, but those who have had the experience of freighting with an ox team know their tricks.

“Before we got to Austin a big snow came and covered the ground several inches deep. We stopped at the edge of a little town — Baghdad, ,I believe it was called — and bought feed for our oxen from a man named Oliver. He let us sleep in his barn, so we stayed there until the weather got so we could travel. Then we went on and ot our lumber and finally got back to San Saba. I think that we were a month on the road.

“Another time we went from Richland Creek to the Concho River twenty or thirty miles below San Angelo and gathered a wagon-bed full of pecans. The country wasn't settled up then; we seldom saw any body or any sign of a ranch. So anyone could gather all of the pecans he could find, as no one claimed them. The country was full of all sorts of game, so that we could hunt when we wanted to kill as much game as we needed. But we didn't hunt except when we needed a turkey or deer to eat.

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"We weren't gone any longer on this trip than it took us to get our load and get back home, for it was dangerous to be traveling up in that country, because the Indians were passing through there often. We carried 8 our pecans to San Saba and sold them, I think that we get four cents a pound for them.

"Two of my uncles were killed by Indians. Uncle John Myers was killed somewhere on the plains. We never knew for sure whether the Indians killed him or not, but he was killed on 'Indian credit', as many people were killed in those days. Uncle Boze Wood was killed on Richland Creek. He and Uncle Henry Wood were out north of Richland at what is called Cottonwood Pond, hunting, when the Indians got after them and they had a running fight. Uncle Boze was shot but got home before he died.

"Awhile before he was killed, he and his wife were sleeping out on their porch and had two horses tied close by their bed, so that they could watch and try to keep the Indians from stealing them. Sometime in the night the Indians slipped up and cut the ropes, and led the horses away without awakening them or disturbing several dogs that were lying about in the yard.

"A man by the name of Jackson Brown lived on the creek two or three miles above us, one day an indian boy walked into his yard, approached Mr. Brown, and extended his hand to shake hands. Of course, Mr. Brown couldn't speak the Indian's language, neither could the Indian boy speak our language, but there was a man on the creek named Jones who could speak seven different languages, so he was sent for. Mr. Jones asked the boy why he came, and he said that he had had a sore foot and that the other Indians had run off and left him. He didn't know where to go and finally decided to go in to a white settlement and give himself up, and Mr. Brown's ranch was the first one he came to. He didn't have his bow and arrows with him and Mr. Jones asked him where they were. He said that he had hidden them before he come to the house and went with them and 9 showed them



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where the bow and arrows were. One of the arrows had blood on it, and Mr. Jones asked what he shot with it, and he said he had killed a little fawn with it.

“The next day Nute Brown took the Indian boy to town so that everyone might see him and stopped at our house for us to look at him. He was the first wild Indian I ever saw, and I think that he was the lousiest thing I ever saw. His hair hung down on his back, and I don't suppose that it had ever had a comb pulled through it. It was just covered with nits and lice.

“When Nute got to town with him he had the boy's hair shingled off short, and the doctor put something on his head to kill the nits and lice. Nute got him some clothes and dressed him up so that he didn't look like the same boy when he took him home. He stayed with Mr. Brown a long time and seemed to be very well contented. Mr. Brown had some boys about his size, and I saw him a number of times with them and saw him go swimming with them, I believe that he was still with Mr. Brown when I left that country. I heard afterward that some of Mr. Browns folks took him up to San Angelo, and he wanted to stay there with the Mexicans, so they left him there.

“A man by the name of Wiley Williams lived at San Saba who used to stake his horse out on moonlight nights in an open place, hide somewhere close by and watch for Indians. One night he noticed something come up close to the horse and heard something grunt or make a noise like a hog. He looked carefully and it appeared to be someone on all fours. He shot at it with a double-barreled shotgun and it ran off. The next morning he trailed it and found a dead Indian.

“I remember of hearing my father tell of a company of Rangers being camped close to a settlement. Some of the Rangers had families living in the settlement, and sometimes some of the men would go home to see how their folks were getting along. One morning they heard a turkey gobble in the direction of the settlement and as one of the men was going to see about his family, he told them that he would go by the turkey roost

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where they had heard the turkey gobble, and if he killed the turkey he would bring it back to camp. After he had been gone a little while and had had some time to get to where the turkey had gobbled, they heard a shot. The man didn't come back to camp with the turkey, and they supposed that he had missed it and gone on home. As he had told them he would do if he failed to kill the turkey.

"The next day they heard the turkey gobble at the same place. Another one of the men wanted to go to see his family, so he told them he would go by the turkey roost and that if he killed the turkey he would bring it back to camp, and that if he missed it he would go on home. After he had been gone a little while they heard another gun-shot. The man didn't return to camp, and they supposed he had gone home.

"The third morning the turkey was still gobbling at the same place, and another one of the men told them he wanted to go home and would go by and see if he could kill the turkey. It wasn't but a little while until they heard him shoot, and pretty soon he came back to camp without the turkey. He had killed it, but it was a buck Indian instead of a turkey gobbler. He had hid in an old hollow stump that had been burnt on one side and would watch in the direction of the Ranger camp and was able to see anyone approaching from that direction. He had a hole to put his gun in and shoot through. So he had killed the first two men. But the third man had come up on the wrong side of the stump and spied the Indian in there and had killed him.

"I suppose that this man had suspected that there was something wrong about the turkey and went around on purpose, or the Indian might have gotten his scalp. So the Indian had gotten two scalps, and lost his own life with it by attempting to get the third one.

"After mother's death, my father married a girl by the name of Warren. Her mother was a widow and lived in Burnett County. One time father and my step-mother left us older children at home to take care of the place while they went on a visit to Burnett County to see Grandma Warren. They were gone several days, and one night while they

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were away we heard our two dogs barking just like they were baying at something in our yard. (We lived in a bottom where the timber made so much shade that it was very dark in there at night.) So I yelled at the dogs and hissed them, and they barked like they were about to tear something to pieces. The next morning we found either sock tracks or moccasin tracks in the yard. We had some plum bushes set out in the yard, and one of them was almost twisted off at the ground. We thought that the Indian, or whoever it was had tried to break the plum bush off to fight the dogs with. We always thought that it was an Indian hunting for horses, as people usually tied their horses up at night in some place to try to hide them from the Indians, especially on moonlight nights, or when they thought the Indians were liable to make a raid in the country.

"My father had a mare with a very pretty little colt, and he took her off one night and tied her in a bottom where he thought she would be safe if the Indians came around. The next morning when we went to see about her, the little colt had gotten the rope around its neck and choked to death. I was like most children and thought it was awfully bad that the colt choked to death.

"While we lived in San Saba, before my mother's death, my father had gone of the prettiest yellow dun mares; she was just as pretty as a picture. He staked her out one night right in the edge of town, not over 300 yards from where the courthouse stands. The Indians came along and cut the rope and led her off. He heard the dogs barking all over town and heard horses traveling around town, but we supposed that it was someone living there who had been away and was returning. The next morning our horse was gone, and several others had been stolen that night from other persons.

"I remember being at Grandpa's once when I was just a little boy, and we children were put at play. We heard someone hallooing away off as though he was in distress, but being small, we didn't pay much attention to it. We just played on, and about ten o'clock that morning someone came and told us that the Indians had killed old Man Beady Hall out near the round mountain that morning. He had gone out there that morning to see about

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some cows and little [?] that he had out there. I suppose that he was feeding them to gentle the pigs. The little round mountain was about half way between Richland Creek and the San Saba River. Anyone could get on the little round mountain and see along way in every direction he supposed that these Indians were in this mountain looking out to see if they could locate a bunch of horses and [?] Mr. Hall, slipped up on him, and murdered him. Of course, they took his scalp so that when they got home they could have their big war dance, as that was their custom when they made a raid and killed anyone.

"One of the worst scares I ever got by the Indians was when I was about thirteen years old. 'bout seventy-five Indians came down Richland Creek one day. The first place they came to was close to the head of the creek. [?] man named Warren Hudson lived there. He was standing in the door as they rode by. They stopped and led a pony off that he had staked closes to the house and rode on down to where a family of children lived by the name of Harkey. There were twelve or thirteen of these 13 children; both the father and mother were dead. But some of the children were grown, so they still stayed in the homestead, some of the children were playing out on the road; when they saw the Indians coming they all ran to the house except one little girls girl ; she climbed up in an old live oak tree that leaned over the road, thinking they were cowhunters until they were almost under her. She just sat still and the Indians rode under her without seeing her. As they passed the house Joe Harkey got his gun and shot at them two or three times, but the Indians rode on without paying any attention to him.

"A little farther down the creek they ran on to about fifteen cowmen who had a bunch of cattle rounded up and had a battle with them. It was about amile from our place. We could hear the guns shooting/ faster than I ever heard guns shoot before, or have since. It wasn't long until we could hear the horses running, and in a few moments we saw the cowmen coming as fast as their horses could run. Alex Hall was in the lead. As soon as he got close enough he called to father and said, 'John, you all better hide; there are a hundred, Indians after us.' So we boys, or the largest ones, just run through the high woods in the fields as fast as we could and ran across the creek to where Uncle [??] lived. In a few

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minutes Pa and the rest of the folks came over there and the cowmen with them — all but a man named Bomar. They said the last time they saw Bomar the Indians were right on his heels and that they were satisfied that the Indians had killed him.

“In those times everybody used what were called cap-and bell guns and pistols, sot it took some time to reload a gun or pistol. So the cowmen men got powder, caps and bullets from Pa and reloaded their guns and pistols. Then they all went down on the river where their families lived 14 except two—they left Parson Davis with us and another man to wait on him. The Indians had lanced Parson Davis, under the arm, but he soon got over it.

“We all stayed at Uncle Spence's that night. Uncle Spence lived in a field, and about ten o'clock that night we heard someone halloo down back of the field, and Pa stepped out and asked, 'Is that you, Bomar?'/ Bomar answered, 'Yes,' Pa said, 'I thought you were dead.' 'No, he said, 'I aint dead.' So he came on in. The Indians hadn't even scratched him. Mr. Bomar said that the Indians crowded him so close that he ran to the creek, jumped off his horse, and ran under a little bank in the edge of a hole of water. He stayed there a few minutes and listened, and soon as the Indians quit making a noise, he slipped out and went into the post oaks and climbed up into a thick-topped elm tree and stayed until after dark. Then he got down and came on in. The hole of water he hid in was called the Bomar Hole after that, and the flat where they had the battle with the Indians was called the Bomar Flat.

“In the battle the cowmen had with the Indians, if they killed an, Indian, the Indians carried him off, as they always did if they could. They found blood on the trail the Indians took, so we supposed they had wounded some of them. These Indians had robbed the Widow Lindley's house and burned it as they came in up on the Colorado close to Trickum. The Widow and children happened to be away fromhome, or they might have been murdered.

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"Capt. Wood was in this battle, and he shot at an Indian who had a dress skirt of Mrs. Lindley's on his head for a headdress. He either cut it off his head or made him dodge till he lost it, for it was left lying on the battle ground.

"After this raid, the few families that lived on Richland Creek decided that it wasn't safe to stay there because the Indians were coming 15 often and in such large bands, and that the few neighbors up and down the creek wouldn't have much chance to defend their families against one of the large bands of Indians. So we all moved down on the river close to San Saba town where it was more thickly settled, so we would have more protection. When we moved, we crossed the trail the Indians made that had the battle with the cowmen. It was so plain that we could see it for a hundred yards or more ahead of us.

"Sometime after the battle on Bomar Flat, I was horse hunting one morning in the Bomar Flat and I looked up the creek and saw Sam Dunkin Duncan come riding down the road. As I was afoot, I thought that I would sit down by the side of the road and wait until he came up to me. He saw me and thought that I was an Indian sitting there and raised his gun to shoot at me. So I got up and stepped out in the road where he could see me; then he came on to me. He told me that the Indians were in the country and said for me to be very careful. He said that he came very near shooting me.

"As soon as the Indians quit coming in such large bands and so often, we moved back on Richland Creek at our old home. But they made several raids after that, off and on for several years. My father had a nice bunch of horses, and they kept stealing them until they got nearly all of them.

"I had claimed several horses, but the Indians had stolen them. So I bought a pony and Pa bought a fine mare at the same time. We had had them only about two weeks when the Indians stole them one night. Some neighbors followed them the next morning, overtook them sometime that day, and captured all of the horses except the ones the Indians were riding. The Indians saw the men coming after them, and they ran and made their escape.

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Then the men drove the horses back and put them in a pen and notified the people to come and get their horses. I went that evening and 16 got my pony, but pa didn't get his mare. We supposed that an Indian was riding her, an she was a good animal, and the Indians always rode the best horses they had when they thought there was any danger of being overtaken.

"A short time after that the report got out that the Indians were in the country again and some of the neighbors got up a little squad of men and boys to go up on the head of Richland to look for them and try to catch them as they went out, or try to strike their trail. I went along with them; I think that there were about twenty of us. I was about fifteen years old then, and there were some more boys in the little band about my age. We rode all day and didn't see any signs of Indians.

"About dark some of the men decided that there wasn't any use in staying out that night and were in favor of going home. However, some wanted to stay all night and said that they were going to do so. Then those in favor of going home decided that they would stay too if they would all hobble their horses and herd them. So everyone agreed to the proposition, and they unsaddled their horses and hobbled them, all except my horse and Bill Shipman's we were going to take the first turn herding the horses. By the time we were ready to go on herd, some of the first horses that were hobbled out had grazed off some distance, so we started out to round them back and get them all together again so that we could herd them. Bill Shipman went west of the camp and I went east. In a few minutes Bill ran back to camp and said that he had [he had?] seen a man out there on a horse, and the men all got their bridles and began to catch their horses and saddle up. Jim Harkey got his horse saddled first and galloped out in the direction that Bill had seen the man, and he saw a man on a horse in the direction that Bill had seen the man, in the shade of a tree. The man ran, and Jim chased him some distance and shot his pistol empty at him, but he soon disappeared in the brush. After we all 16 got all of the horses rounded up and caught, we decided that it would be best to tie them and guard them so that the Indians couldn't run in and stampede them. So we guarded them the rest of the night, and the next morning we

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hunted the country all around there to try to find some trail of the Indians, but we failed to find any trail that we could follow so we gave up the hunt and went home.”

PART TWO TO FOLLOW.